

Miss Younge in the Character of Artemisa.



*Prince, you pass not
Guards, keep the door.*

Act I. Sc. 2.

Published by Harrison & C. Moth 1. 27 81.

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The Ambitious Stepmother.

A

T R A G E D Y.

As it is Acted at the

T H E A T R E S - R O Y A L

I N

Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden.

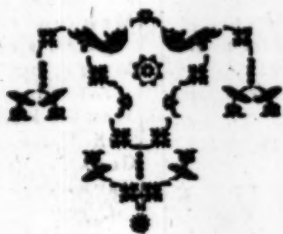
By NICHOLAS ROWE, Esq.

—Dicet hæc dare dona novercam.

OVID. Metam. lib. 9.

Vane Ligur, frustra que animis elate superbis,
Nequicquam—tentaſti lubricus artes,
Advenit qui veſtra dies muliebribus armis
Verba redargueret.

VIRG. Æn. lib. II.



L O N D O N;

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M DCC LXXXI,

PROLOGUE.

IF dying lovers yet deserve a tear,
If a sad story of a maid's despair,
Yet move compassion in the pitying fair;
This day the poet does his arts employ,
The soft access of your souls to try.
Nor let the Stoick boast his mind unmov'd;
The brute philosopher, who ne'er has prov'd
The joy of loving and of being lov'd;
Who scorns his human nature to confess,
And, striving to be more than man, is less.
Nor let the men the weeping fair accuse,
Those kind protectors of the Tragick Muse,
Whose tears did moving Otway's labours crown,
And made the poor Monimia's grief their own:
Those tears their art, not weakness, has confess'd,
Their grief approv'd the niceness of their taste,
And they wept most, because they judg'd the best.
O could this age's writers hope to find
An audience to compassion thus inclin'd,
The stage would need no farce, nor song, nor dance,
Nor capering Monsieur brought from active France:
Cinch, and his organ-pipe, his dogs and bear,
To native Barnet might again repair,
Or breathe, with Captain Otter, Bankside air.
Majestick Tragedy should once again
In purple pomp adorn the swelling scene:
Her search should ransack all the ancients store,
The fortunes of their loves and arms explore,
Such as might grieve you, but should please you more.
What Shakespeare durst not, this bold age should do,
And famous Greek and Latin beauties shew:
Shakespeare, whose genius, to itself a law,
Could men in every bright of nature draw,
And copy'd all but women that he saw.
Those ancient heroines your concern should move,
Their grief and anger much, but most their love;
For in the account of every age we find
The best and fairest of that sex were kind,
To pity always and to love inclin'd.
Assert, ye fair-ones, who in judgment sit,
Your ancient empire over love and wit;
Reform our sense, and teach the men to obey:
They'll leave their tumbling, if you lead the way.
Be but what those before to Otway were:
O were you but as kind! we know you are as fair.

EPILOGUE.

THE spleen and vapours, and this doleful play,
Have mortify'd me to that height to-day,
That I am almost in the mortal mind,
To die indeed, and leave you all behind.
Know then, since I resolve in peace to part,
I mean to leave to one alone my heart:
(Last favours will admit of no partage,
I bar all sparing, but upon the stage)
To one who can with one alone be blest,
The peaceful monarch of a single breast:

To one—But, oh! how hard 'twill be to find
That phoenix in your sickle changing kind!
New loves, new interests, and religions new,
Still your fantastick appetites pursue.
Your sickly fancies loath what you possess,
And every restless fool would change his place.
Some weary of their peace and quiet grown,
Want to be hoisted up aloft, and shewn:
Whilst from the envy'd height, the wise get safely
down.

We find your wavering temper to our cost,
Since all our pains and care to please is lost.
Musick in vain supports with friendly aid
Her sister Poetry's declining head:
Shew but a mimick ape or French buffoon,
You to the other house in shoals are gone,
And leave us here to tune our crowds alone.
Must Shakespeare, Fletcher, and laborious Ben
Be left for Scaramouch and Harlequin?
Allow you are inconstant, yet 'tis strange,
For sense is still the same, and ne'er can change.
Yet 'en in that you vary as the rest;
And every day new notions are profess'd.
Nay, there's a wit has found, as I am told,
New ways to heaven, despairing of the old:
He swears he'll spoil the clerk and sexton's trade,
Bells shall no more be rung, nor graves be made:
The bear and six no longer be in fashion,
Since all the faithful may expect translation.
What think you of the project? I'm for trying,
I'll lay aside these foolish thoughts of dying;
Preserve my youth and vigour for the stage,
And be translated in a good old age.

Dramatis Personæ.

M E N.

ARTAXERXES, Prince of Persia, elder Son to
King Arsaces, by a former Queen.
ARTABAN, Son to Arsaces, by Artemisa.
MEMNON, formerly General to Arsaces, now dis-
graced, a Friend to Artaxerxes.
MIRZA, first Minister of State, in the Interest of
Artemisa and Artaban.
MAGAS, Priest of the Sun, Friend to Mirza and
the Queen.
CLEANTHES, Friend to Artaban.
ORCHANES, Captain of the Guards to the
Queen.

W O M E N.

ARTEMISA, formerly the Wife of Tiribastus,
Persian Lord, now married to the King, and
Queen of Persia.
AMESTRIS, Daughter to Memnon, in love with
and beloved by, Artaxerxes.
CLEONE, Daughter to Mirza, in love with Ar-
taxerxes, and beloved by Artaban.
BELIZA, Confidante to Cleone.

T H E AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

A C T I.

SCENE, *A Royal Palace.*

Enter at several Doors, Mirza and Magas.

Mir. WHAT bring'st thou, Magas? Say, how fares the king?

Mag. As one, whom when we number with the We say the most we can; tho' sure it must [living, Be happier far to quit a wretched being, Than keep it on such terms."

Mir. My royal mistress Artemisa's fate, And all her son young Artaban's high hopes, Hang on this lucky crisis; since this day The haughty Artaxerxes and old Memnon Enter Persepolis: the yearly feast Devoted to our glorious god the Sun Hides their designs under a holy veil; And thus religion is a mask for faction. But let their guardian Genii still be watchful, For if they chance to nod, my waking vengeance Shall surely catch that moment to destroy them.

Mag. 'Tis said the fair Amestris, Memnon's Comes in their company. [daughter,

Mir. That fatal beauty, With most malignant influence, hast cross'd My first and great ambition. When my brother, The great Cleander, fell by Memnon's hand, (You know the story of our houses' quarrel) I fought the king for justice on the murderer! And to confirm my interest in the court, I offer'd my Cleone to the prince, Fierce Artaxerxes; he, with rude disdain, Refus'd the proffer; and to grate me more, Publickly own'd his passion for Amestris; And, in despite e'en of his father's justice, Espous'd the cause of Memnon.

Mag. E'en from that noted era, I remember, You dated all your service to the queen, Our common mistress.

Mir. 'Tis true, I did so: nor was it in vain; She did me right, and satisfy'd my vengeance: Memnon was banish'd, and the prince, disgrac'd, Went into exile with him. Since that time, Since I have been admitted to her council, And seen her, with unerring judgment, guide The reins of empire; I have been amaz'd, To see her more than manly strength of soul, What story tells of great Semiramis, Or rolling time, that gathers as it goes, Has added more, such Artemisa is.

Mag. Sure 'twas a mark of an uncommon genius, To bend a soul like that of great Arfaces, And charm him to her sway.

Mir. Certainly fate, Or somewhat like the force of fate, was in it; And still whene'er remembrance sets that scene Before my eyes, I view it with amazement.

Mag. I then was young, a stranger to the court,

And only took the story as reported By different fame; you must have known it better.

Mir. Indeed I did; then favour'd by the king, And by that means a sharer in the secret, 'Twas on a day of publick festival, When beauteous Artemisa stood to view (Behind the covert of a golden lattice) The king and court returning from the temple: When just as by her stand Arfaces pass'd, The window by design or chance fell down, And to his view expos'd her blushing beauties. She seem'd surpris'd, and presently withdrew; But e'en that moment was an age in love: So was the monarch's heart for passion moulded, So apt to take at first the soft impression. Soon as we were alone, I found the evil; Already past a remedy, and vainly Urg'd the repentment of her injur'd lord: His love was deaf to all.

Mag. Was Tiribafus absent?

Mir. He was then general of the horse, Under old Memnon in the Median war. But if that distant view so much had charm'd him, Imagine how he burnt, when, by my means, He view'd her beauties nearer; when each action, And every graceful sound conspir'd to charm him: In short,

After some faint resistance, like a bride That strives awhile, tho' eager for the bliss, The furious king enjoyed her; And to secure their joys, a snare was laid For her unthinking lord, in which he fell, Before the fame of this could reach his ears. Since that, she still has by successful arts Maintain'd that pow'r which first her beauty gain'd.

Mag. With deepest foresight, wisely has she laid A sure foundation for the future greatness Of Artaban, her only darling son. Each busy thought that rolls within her breast, Labours for him: the king, when first he sickn'd, Declar'd he should succeed him in the throne.

Mir. That was a point well gain'd: nor were the Of Artaxerxes worth our least of fears, [eldership If Memnon's interest did not prop his cause. Since then they stand secur'd, by being join'd, From reach of open force, it were a master-piece, Worthy a thinking head, to sow division And seeds of jealousy, to loose those bonds Which knit and hold them up; that so divided, With ease they might be ruin'd.

Mag. That's a difficulty next to impossible.

Mir. Cease to think so.

E'en Memnon's temper seems to give th' occasion; Of wrong impatient, headlong to revenge; Tho' bold, yet wants that faculty of thinking, That should direct his anger. Valiant fools Were made by Nature for the wise to work with; They are their tools, and 'tis the sport of statesmen,

When heroes knock their knotty heads together,
And fall by one another.

Mag. What you've said,
Has wak'd a thought in me which may be lucky :
Ere he was banish'd for your brother's murder,
There was a friendship 'twixt us; and tho' then
I left his barren soil, to root myself
More safely under your auspicious shade,
Yet still pretending ties of ancient love,
At his arrival here I'll visit him :
Whence this advantage may at least be made,
To ford his shallow soul.

Mir. Oh! much, much more;
'Twas happily remember'd :
Thy function too will varnish o'er our arts,
And sanctify dissembling.

Mag. Yet still I doubt,
His caution may draw back, and fear a snare.

Mir. Tell him, the better to assist the fraud,
That even I wish his friendship, and would gladly
Forget that cause of hate, which long has held us
At mortal distance, give up my revenge,
A grateful off'ring to the publick peace.

Mag. Could you afford him such a bribe as that,
A brother's blood yet unatton'd?

Mir. No, Magas;
It is not in the power of fate to raze
That thought from out my memory :
Yet I would have thee promise that, and more ;
The friendship of the queen, the restitution
Of his command, and honours, that his daughter
Shall be the bride of Artaban; say any thing :
Thou know'st the faith of courtiers, and their oaths,
Like those of lovers; the gods laugh at 'em.

Mag. Doubt not my zeal to serve our royal mistress,
And in her interest yours, my friend and patron.

Mir. My worthy priest! still be my friend, and
share

The utmost of my pow'r : by greatness rais'd,
[*Embracing.*

Thou, like the god thou serv'st, shalt shine aloft,
And with thy influence rule the under world.
But see! the queen appears;
Retire, lest we disturb her.

[*They retire to the side of the stage.*

Enter the Queen attended.

Queen. Be fix'd, my soul, fix'd on thy own firm
basis.

Be constant to thyself; nor know the weakness,
The poor irresolution of my sex.

Could fate e'er mean

Me for a wife, a slave, to Tiribasus?

Therefore in just assertion of myself,
I shook him off, and pass'd those narrow limits,
Which laws contrive in vain for souls born great.
There is not, must not be, a bond for greatness!
Pow'r gives a sanction, and makes all things just.
Ha! Mirza! worthy lord, I saw thee not,

[*Seeing Mirza.*

So busy were my faculties in thought.

Mir. The thoughts of princes dwell in sacred
privacy,

[*Bowing.*

Unknown and venerable to the vulgar;
And like a temple's innermost recesses,
None enter to behold the hallowed mysteries,
Unbidden of the god that dwells within.

Queen. Wife Mirza! Were my soul a temple, fit
For gods and godlike counsels to inhabit,
Thee only would I chuse of all mankind,
To be the priest, still favour'd with access;
Whose piercing wit, sway'd by unerring judgment,
Might mingle even with assembled gods,
When they devise unchangeable decrees,

And call 'em fate.

Mir. Whate'er I am, each faculty,
The utmost power of my exerted soul,
Preserves a being for your service;
And when I am not yours, I am no more.

Queen. Time shall not know an end of my ac-
knowledgments:

But every day of our continu'd lives
Be witness of my gratitude, to draw,
The knot, which holds our common interest, closer:
Within six days, my son, my Artaban,
Equally dear to me as life and glory,
In publick shall espouse the fair Cleone,
And be my pledge of everlasting amity.

Mir. O, royal lady! you outbid my service:
And all returns are vile, but words the poorest.

Queen. Enough! be, as thou hast been, still my
I ask no more. But I observe of late, [friend;
Your daughter grows a stranger to the court;
Know you the cause?

Mir. A melancholy girl;
Such in her infancy her temper was,
Soft, even beyond her sex's tenderness;
Her closet and the gods share all her time,
Except when only (by some maid attended)
She seeks some shady solitary grove,
Or by the gentle murmurs of some brook
Sits sadly list'ning to a tale of sorrow,
Till with her tears she swell the narrow stream.

Queen. It is not well; these thoughts must be re-
mov'd;

That eating canker, grief, with wasteful spite,
Preys on the rosy bloom of youth and beauty:
But love shall chase away these clouds of sadness;
My son shall breathe so warm a gale of sighs,
As shall dissolve those icicles that hang
Like death about her heart.

Attend us, holy Magas, to the king,
Nor cease to importune the mighty gods
To grant him him health, tho' much I fear in vain.

[*Exeunt Queen, Magas, and Attendants.*

Mir. This meddling priest longs to be found a
Howe'er I give his wife proposal way, [fool:
Nay, urg'd him to go on; the shallow fraud
Will ruin him for ever with my enemies,
And make him firmly mine, spite of his fears,
And natural inconsistency.

While choice remains, he will be still unsteady,
And nothing but necessity can fix him. [Exit.

Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Attendants.

Art. Methinks, my noble father and my friend,
We enter here like strangers, and unlook'd for:
Each busy face we meet, with wonder starts,
And seems amaz'd to see us.

Mem. Well may th' ignoble herd
Start, if with heedless steps they unawares
Tread on the lion's walk: a prince's genius
Awes with superior greatness all beneath him:
With wonder they behold the great Arfaces
Reviv'd again in godlike Artaxerxes.

In you they see him, such as oft' they did
Returning from his wars, and crown'd with conquest,
When all our virgins met him on the way,
And with their songs and dances bless'd his triumph:
Now basely aw'd by factious priests and women,
They start at majesty, and seem surpris'd,
As if a god had met 'em. In honour's name,
Why have we let this be? why have we languish'd,
And suffer'd such a government as this
To waste our strength, and wear our empire low?

Art. Curs'd be the means by which these illa-
Fatal alike to me as to my country; [arose;
Which my great soul, unable to revenge,

THE AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

5

Has yet with indignation only seen,
Cut off; by arts of coward priests and statesmen,
(Whom I disdain'd with servile smiles to court,)
From the great right which God and Nature gave,
My birthright to a throne.

Mem. Nor priests, nor statesmen,
Could have compleated such an ill as that,
If women had not mingled in the mischief;
If Artemisa had not by her charms,
And all her sex's cunning, wrought the king,
Old, obvious to her arts, decay'd in greatness,
Dead to the memory of what once he was,
Among his other failings, to forget
All that a father and a king could owe
To such a son as you;—to cut you off
From your succession, from your hopes of empire,
And graft her upstart offspring on to royalty!

Art. But if I bear it,
Oh, may I live to be my brother's slave,
The scorn of those brave friends that own my cause;
May you, my father, spurn me for a coward,
Leave me to vile despair. By Heav'n! my heart
Sits lighter in my bosom, when I think
That I this day shall meet the boy my brother,
Whose young ambition with aspiring wings
Dares ev'n to mate my greatness!

Mem. Fame, that speaks
Minutely every circumstance of princes,
Describes him bold, and fiercely fond of power,
Impatient of command, and hardly deigning
To be controul'd by his imperious mother.
'Tis said too
That books and the politer arts
Have been his care; already
He mingles in their councils, and they trust
His youth with secrets of important villainy.
The crowd, taught by his creatures to admire him,
Style him a god in wisdom.

Art. Be that his glory:
Let him with pedants hunt for praise in books,
Pour out his life amongst the lazy gown-men,
Grow old and vainly proud in fancy'd knowledge,
Unequal to the task of vast ambition;
Ambition! the desire of active souls,
That pushes 'em beyond the bounds of nature,
And elevates the hero to the god.
But see! my love, your beauteous daughter, comes,
And e'en ambition sickens at her sight.

Enter Amestris attended.
Revenge and fierce desires of glory cease
To urge my passions, master'd by her eyes;
And only gentle fires now warm my breast.

Am. I come, my father, to attend your order.
[To Memnon.]
Mem. 'Tis well; and I would have thee still be
The malice of the faction which I hate, [near me.
Would vent itself ev'n on thy innocence,
Went thou not safe under a father's care.

Art. Oh! say a lover's too; nor can you have
An interest in her safety more than mine.
Love gives a right superior e'en to nature;
Or love is nature in the noblest meaning,
The cause and the preserver of the world.
These arms, that long to press thee to my bosom,
Shall ever shall defend thee.

Mem. Therefore, my son,
To your care I leave our common charge:
Tiranes with our friends expect my orders;
Those when I have dispatch'd, upon the instant
Will return, and meet at your apartment.

[Exit Memnon.]
Art. Come to my arms, and let me hide you
there

From all those fears that vex thy beating heart;
Be safe and free from all those fancy'd dangers,
That haunt thy apprehension.

Am. Can you blame me,
If from retirement drawn, and pleasing solitude,
I fear to tempt this stormy sea, the world,
Whose ev'ry beach is strew'd with wrecks of wretches
That daily perish in it? Curs'd ambition!
Why dost thou come to trouble my repose?

Art. Cease to complain, my love, and let no
thought,
But what brings peace and joy, approach thy breast.
Let me impart my manly fires to thee,
To warm thy fancy to a taste of glory;
Imperial power, and purple greatness wait thee,
And sue for thy acceptance: by the Sun,
And by Arfaces' head, I will not mount
The throne of Cyrus, but to share it with thee.

Am. Vain shews of happiness! Deceitful pageantry!
Ah, prince! hadst thou but known the joys that
dwell

With humbler fortunes, thou wouldst curse thy roy-
Had fate allotted us some obscure village, [alty.
Where only blest'd with life's necessities,
We might have pass'd in peace our happy days,
Free from the cares which crowns and empires bring;
There no step-mother, no ambitious brother,
No wicked statesman, would with impious arts
Have strove to wrest from us our small inheritance,
Or stir the simple hinds to noisy faction:
Our nights had all been blest'd with balmy slumbers,
And all our waking hours been crown'd with love.

Art. Exquisite charmer! Now, by Orosmales,
I swear, thy each soft accent melts my soul:
The joy of conquest, and immortal triumph,
Honour and greatness, all that fires the hero
To high exploits and everlasting fame,
Grows vile in sight of thee. My haughty soul,
By nature fierce, and panting after glory,
Could be content to live obscure with thee,
Forgotten and unknown of all but my Amestris.

Am. No, son of great Arfaces, tho' my soul,
Shares in my sex's weakness, and would fly
From noise and faction, and from fatal greatness;
Yet for thy sake, thou idol of my heart,
For thy lov'd sake, spite of my boding fears,
I'll meet the danger which ambition brings,
And tread one path with thee:
This day before your altars will I kneel,
Where all my vows shall for my prince be offer'd;
Still let success attend him, let mankind
Adore in him your visible divinity;
Nor will I importune you for myself,
But sum up all I ask in Artaxerxes.

Art. And doubt not but the gods will kindly
Their virgin votary, and grant her pray'r; [hear
Our glorious Sun, the source of light and heat,
Whose influence cheers the world he did create,
Shall smile on thee from his meridian skies,
And own the kindred beauties of thy eyes;
Thy eyes which, should his own fair beams decay,
Might shine for him, and bless the world with day.

ACT II.

SCENE, An Apartment of the Palace.

Enter Memnon and Magas.

Mem. **T**HOSE who are wise in courts, my
holy Sir,
Make friendships with the ministers of state,
Nor seek the ruins of a wretched exile,
Lest there should be contagion in misfortunes,

And make th' alliance fatal.

Mag. Friends like Memnon
Are worth being sought in danger;
Whom should we seek for friendship but those few,
Those happy few, within whose breasts alone
The footsteps of lost virtue yet remain.

Mem. I prythee, peace: for nothing misbecomes
The man that would be thought a friend, like
flattery:

Flattery, the meanest kind of base dissembling!
And only us'd to catch the grossest fools:
Besides, it stains the honour of thy function,
Which, like the gods thou serv'st, should be sincere.

Mag. By that sincerity, by all the service
My friendship can express, I would approve it:
And tho' I went not from Persepolis
Companion of your exile, yet my heart
Was with you still; and what I could I did,
Beseeching every god for your return.

Mem. The gods, 'tis true, are just, and have I hope,
At length decreed an end to my misfortunes;
At least, they give me this, to die with honour,
When life grows vile or burdensome.

Mag. By me they offer all that you can ask,
And point an easy way to happiness.
Spare them the wounds our wretched country fears,
The thousand ills which civil discord brings.
Oh! still that noise of war, whose dread alarms
Frighten repose from country villages,
And stir rude tumult up, and wild distraction
In all our peaceful cities.

Mem. Witness for me,
Ye awful gods, who view our inmost thoughts;
I took not arms, till urg'd by self-defence,
The eldest law of nature.
Impute not then those ills that may ensue,
To me: but those who with incessant hate
Pursue my life, whose malice spreads the flame
To every part, that my devoted fabrick
May in the universal ruin burn.

Mag. And yet e'en there perhaps you judge too
Impetuous passion hurries you so fast, [rashly;
You cannot mark th' advantage of your fortune.

Mem. Has not the law been urg'd to set a brand
Of foul dishonour on my hoary head?
Ha! am I not proscrib'd?

Mag. Forget that thought,
That jarring grates your soul, and turns the harmony
Of blessed peace to curs'd infernal discord.
Hate and it's fatal causes all shall cease,
And Memnon's name be honour'd as of old;
The bravest and the most successful warrior,
The fortunate defender of his country.

Mem. 'Tis true (nor will it seem a boast to own)
I have fought well for Persia;
Full fifty years harness'd in rugged steel,
I have endur'd the biting winter's blast,
And the severer heats of parching summer:
While they who loll'd at home on lazy couches
Amidst a crew of harlots and soft eunuchs,
Were at my cost secure in luxury:
This is a justice Mirza's self must do me.

Mag. Even he, tho' fatal accidents have set
A moit unhappy bar between your friendship,
Lamenting that there had been cause of enmity,
And owning all the merit of your virtues,
Will often wish fate had ordain'd you friends.

Mem. Our god, the Sun, shall sooner change his
And all th' impossibilities, which poets [course.
Count to extravagance of loose description,
Shall sooner be.

Mag. Yet hear me, noble Memnon:
When by the duty of my priesthood mov'd

I urg'd wife Mirza,

By his concurrence, help, and healing counsel,
To stop those wounds at which his country bleeds;
Griev'd at the thought, he vow'd his whole en-
Should be to close those breaches: [deavour

That e'en Cleander's death, and all those quarrels
That long have nourish'd hatred in your houses,
Should be in joy of publick peace forgotten.

Mem. Oh, could'st thou charm the malice of a
statesman,

And make him quit his purpose of revenge,
Thy preaching might reform the guilty world,
And vice would be no more!

Mag. Nay, e'en the queen
Will bind the confirmation by her son,
And asks the fair Amestris for Prince Artaban.

Mem. Were that the only terms, it were impos-
sible.

Mag. You wou'd not shun th' alliance of a prince?

Mem. No; for it is the glory of my fate,
That Artaxerxes is design'd my son.

Mag. The name of Artaban will be as great
As that of Cyrus, when he shall possess
(As sure he shall) his throne.

Mem. Ha! what means he?
This villain priest! But hold my rage a little,
And learn dissimulation; I'll try him farther. [Aside.
You talk in riddles, when you name a throne,
And Artaban! the gods
Have put a bar between his hopes and empire.

Mag. What bar?

Mem. The best, an elder brother's claim.

Mag. That's easily remov'd; the king their fa-
On just and weighty reasons, has decreed [ther,
His sceptre to the younger: add to this,
The joint concurrence of our Persian lords,
Who only want your voice to make it firm.

Mem. Can I, can they, can any honest hand,
Join in an act like this? Is not the elder
By nature pointed out for preference?
Ask those thou nam'd'st but now, what made them
What titles had they had, if merit only [lords?
Cou'd have conferr'd a right, if Nature had not
Strove hard to thrust the worst deserving first,
And stamp'd the noble mark of eldership
Upon their baser metal!

Mag. Sure there may be
Reasons of so much pow'r and cogent force,
As may e'en set aside this right of birth;
If sons have rights, yet father's have 'em too.
'Twere an invidious task to enter into
The insolence and other faults which mov'd
Royal Asfices to a just displeasure
Against his eldest son, prince Artaxerxes.

Mem. Ha! dare not for thy life, I charge thee,
To brand the spotless virtue of my prince [dare not
With falsehood of most base and damn'd contrivance.
I tell thee, envious priest, should the just gods
Require severe account of thy past life,
And charge remembrance to dispose thy crimes
In rank and hideous order to thy view,
Horror and guilt of soul would make thee mad!

Mag. You take the matter farther than I mean
My friendship only aims at your advantage. [it

Mem. Away! I cannot bear thy base dissembling
My honest soul disdains thee and thy friendship.
How hast thou dar'd to think so vilely of me,
That I would condescend to thy mean arts,
And traffick with thee for a prince's ruin?
Wert thou not privileg'd like age and women,
My sword should reach thee, and revenge the wrong
Thy tongue has done his fame!

Mag. Ungrateful lord!

THE AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

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Would'st thou invade my life, as a return
For proffer'd love? But let th' event declare
How great a good by me sincerely offer'd,
Thy dull romantick honour has refus'd,
And since I have discharg'd the debt I ow'd
To former friendship, if the gods hereafter
Send ruin down, and plague thee with confusion,
Remember me in vain, and curse thy folly.

[Exit Magas.]

Mem. No; my remembrance treasures honest
thoughts,

And holds not things like thee; I scorn thy friend-
And would not owe my life to such a villain: [ship,
But thou art hardly saint enough to prophesy.
Were all thy tribe like thee, it might well startle
Our lay unlearned faith, when through such hands
The knowledge of the gods is reach'd to man.
But thus those gods instruct us, that not all
(Who like intruders thrust into their service,
And turn the holy office to a trade)
Participate their sacred influence.

This then is your own cause; 'ye awful powers,
Revenge yourselves, your violated altars,
That those who with unhallow'd hands approach,
May tremble at your justice. [Exit.]

SCENE, *The Palace.*

Enter the Queen, Artaban, Mirza, Magas, and Attendants.

Art. My brother then is come?

Mir. My lord, I saw him;

With him old haughty Memnon; as they pass'd,
With fierce disdain they view'd the gazing crowd,
And with dumb pride seem'd to neglect that worship
Which yet they wish'd to find: this way they move,
'Tis said, to ask an audience of the king.

Queen. Mirza, 'tis well; I thank thy timely care;
Here will we face this storm of insolence,
Nor fear the noisy thunder: let it roll,
Then burst, and spend at once its idle rage.

Art. Why meet we thus like wrangling advocates,
To urge the justice of our cause with words?
I hate this parle, 'tis tame: if we must meet,
Give me my arms, and let us stake at once
Our rights of merit and of eldership,
And prove like men our title.

Mir. 'Twere unsafe.

They come surrounded by a crowd of friends;
To strike thro' these, were dangerous and rash.
Fate waits for them elsewhere with certain ruin:
From Mirza's hand expect it.

Queen. Be it so:

Auspicious sage, I trust thee with my fortune,
My hopes of greatness; do thou guide 'em all,
For me and for thyself. My son, give way;
Nor let thy hasty youth disturb with outrage
The present necessary face of peace;
Occasions great and glorious will remain
Worthy thy arms and courage.

Art. I obey,

And willingly resign th' unmanly task.

Mir. My royal mistress,
Prepare to meet with more than brutal fury
From the fierce prince and Memnon.

Queen. Well I know

The insolence and native pride of each;
With scurrile taunts and blackest infamy
They load my name: but let them rail,
A woman's vengeance waits them.

Mir. They are here.

Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Attendants.

Art. Ye tutelard gods, who guard this royal fabrick,
And thou, O Orosmades, the protector
Of the great Persian race, ere yet my father,

Royal Asfaxes, mingle with your godheads,
Grant me once more to lay before his feet
His eldest born, his once-lov'd Artaxerxes,
To offer my obedience to his age;
All that a son can owe to such a father.
You, who with haggard eyes stare wildly on me,
If (as by your attendance here you seem)
You serve the king my father, lead me to him.

Queen. And dost thou wonder that mankind should
When parricides and rebels, in despite [stare,
Of nature, majesty, and reverend age,
With impudus force and ruffian violence,
Would rob a king and father of his life?
Cut off his short remains—

Art. Ha! say'st thou, woman?
I pry thee, peace, and urge not a reply;
I would not hold acquaintance with thy infamy.

Queen. Ye righteous pow'rs, whose justice awes
the world,
Let not your thunders sleep, when crimes like these
Stalk in the open air.

Art. Thy priest instructs thee,
Else sure thou hadst not dar'd to tempt the gods,
And trifle with their justice. Canst thou name it,
And look on me? On me, whom thy curs'd arts
Have strove to bar from native right to empire;
Made me a stranger to a father's love,
And broke the bands of nature, which once held
The nearest to his heart! [me

Queen. Had he not reason,
When thou, with rebel insolence, didst dare
To own and to protect that hoary ruffian?

[Pointing to Memnon.]
And in despite e'en of thy father's justice,
To stir the factious rabble up to arms
For him; and make a murderer's cause thy own?

Mem. I had another name; nor shouldst thou
move me,

Insulting queen, to words, did not remembrance
With horror sting my soul for Tiribafus,
Thy murder'd lord, when by my fatal orders,
And by his own high courage urg'd, he fell,
To make thy way to guilty greatness easy.
I thought him then a traitor (for thy arts
Had taught the royal mandate so to call him)
Too big for publick justice; and on that pretence
Consented to the snare that catch'd his life;
So my obedient honesty was made
The pander to thy lust and black ambition.

Except the guilt of that accursed day,
In all my iron years of wars and danger,
From blooming youth down to decaying age,
My fame ne'er knew a stain of foul dishonour;
And if that made me guilty, think what thou art,
The cause and the contriver of that mischief!

Queen. What, nam'st thou Tiribafus! Be his guilt
Forgotten with his memory. Think on Cleander,
And let the furies that enquire for blood,
Stir horror up, and bitterest remorse,
To gnaw thy anxious soul. Oh, great Cleander!
Unworthy was thy fate, thou first of warriors,
To fall beneath a base assassin's stab,
Whom all the thirsty instruments of death
Had in the fire of battle sought in vain.

Mem. In sight of heaven and of the equal gods,
I will avow that my revenge was just,
My injur'd honour could not ask for less:
Since he refus'd to do a soldier's justice,
I us'd him as I ought.

Queen. Amazing boldness!
And dar'st thou call that act a soldier's justice?
Didst thou not meet him with dissimulation, friendship,
Sliding the rancour of thy heart in smiles?

When he, (whose open, unsuspecting nature
Thought thee a soldier honest as himself.)
Came to the banquet as secure of peace,
Then Memnon, (at an hour when saw art-villains,
The sprightly juice infusing gentler thoughts)
Unequal to him in the face of war,
Stole on Cleander with a coward's malice,
And struck him to the heart.

Mem. By the stern god,
By Mars, the patron of my honour'd wars,
'Tis basely false. In his own drunken brawl
The boaster fell. I bore his lavish tongue, [per
Nor thought him worth my sword, till his cold tem-
(Warm'd with the wine) he dar'd me to the combat;
Then pleas'd to meet him in that fit of valour,
I took him at his word, and
I kill'd him while it lasted.

Art. Cease we, my friend,
This women's war of railing; when they talk,
Men should be still, and let noise tire itself.
I came to find a father, tho' my fears
Suggest the worst of evils to my thoughts,
And make me dread to hear Arfaces' fate.
Lead, Memnon, to the presence.

Queen. Prince, you pass not.
Guards, keep the door. The king your father
lives—

Art. Ha! if he lives, why lives he not to me?
Why am I thus shut out and banish'd from him?
Why are my veins rich with his royal blood?
Why did he give me life, if not to serve him?
Forbid me not to wait upon his bed,
And watch his sickly slumbers, that my youth
May with it's service glad his drooping age,
And his cold hand may bless me ere he die.
Nay, be a queen, and rob me of his crown,
But let me keep my right to filial piety.

Queen. Well hast thou urg'd the specious name of
To hide deform'd rebellion: hast thou not [duty,
With thy false arts poison'd his people's loyalty?
What meant thy pompous progress thro' the empire?
Thy vast profusion to the factious nobles,
Whose interest sways the crowd, and stirs up mutiny?
Why did thy baughty, fierce, disdainful soul
Stoop to the meanest arts which catch the vulgar;
Herd with them, fawn upon them, and carest them?
Appeal to them, to them relate thy wrongs,
And make them judges of thy father's justice!
Thy cruel, and unnatural lust of power
Has sunk thy father more than all his years,
And made him wither in a green old age.

Art. False all as hell: nor had I arm'd my friends
But to defend that right—

Queen. Dost thou not come,
Impatient of delay, to hasten fate?
To bring that death, the lingering disease
Would only for a day or two defer?

Art. I hear thee, and disdain thy little malice,
That dares to stain my virtue with a crime
It views with most abhorrence; but reproach
Is lost on thee, since modesty, with all
The virtues that adorn thy sex, is fled.

Queen. Audacious rebel!

Art. Infamous adulteress!

Stain of my father's bed, and of his throne!

Art. Villain, thou ly'st: O Madam, give me way,
[To the Queen, who holds him, drawing his sword.
Whatever bars my fury, calls me base;
Unworthy of the honour of your son!

Queen. Hold, Artaban: my honour suffers not
From his lewd breath.

Art. Ha! who art thou?

Art. The son of great Arfaces.

Art. No, 'tis false; thy forging mother's dam'd
contrivance.

Seek for thy father in that plotting fellow,
[Pointing to Miran.

The hero's race disclaims thee. Why dost thou
frown,

And knit thy boyish brow? Dost thou dare sought
Worthy the rank of the divine Arfaces?
If so, come forth; break from that woman's arms,
And meet me with thy good sword like a man.

Art. Yes, Artaxerxes, yes; thou shalt be met;
The mighty gods have held us in the balance,
And one of us is doom'd to sink for ever;
Nor can I bear a long delay of fate.

But with the great decision were even now:
Proud and ambitious prince, I dare like thee
All that is great and glorious. Like thine,
Immortal thirst of empire fires my soul:
My soul, which of superior power impatient,
Disdains thy eldership; therefore in arms
(Which give the noblest right to kings) I will
To death dispute with thee the throne of Cyrus.

Art. Do this, and thou art worthy of my anger.
Oh, energy divine of great ambition,
That can inform the souls of beardless boys,
And ripen them to men, in spite of nature!
I tell thee, boy, that empire is a cause,
For which the gods might wage immortal war.
Then let my soul exert her utmost virtue,
And think at least thou art Arfaces' son;
That the idea of thy fancy'd father
May raise and animate thy lesser genius,
And make thee fit to meet my arm in battle.

Art. Oh! doubt not but my soul is chain'd
with greatness:

Hear only this; our father, press'd by age,
And a long train of evils which that brings,
Languishes in the last extremes of life;
Since thou wouldst blot my birth with base dishonour,
Be this my proof of filial piety;
While yet he lives, cease we our enmity,
Nor let the hideous noise of war disturb
His parting soul.

Art. I take thee at thy word:
Let his remains of life be peace betwixt us;
And after that, let all our time be war.
Remember when we meet, since one must fall,
Who conquers and survives, survives to empire.

[Exeunt severally Queen and Artaban, Artaxerxes
and Memnon, cum suis.

Mir. Most fortunate event! which gives us more
Than e'en our wishes could have ask'd. This trust
Gives lucky opportunity for thinking;
'Twill lull these thoughtless heroes to security.

Mag. Th' approaching festival will more confirm it;
Since none, not e'en our kings, approach their
With any mark of war's destructive rage, [temple
But sacrifice unarm'd.

Mir. A lucky thought
Is in my mind at once compleatly form'd,
Like Grecian Pallas in the head of Jove.
When Memnon, Artaxerxes, and their friends,
Shall, in obedience to the holy rites,
To-morrow at the altar's bow unarm'd,
Orphanes with a party of the guards,
Who in my palace shall this night be plac'd,
May at that private door which opens into
The temple, rush at once, and seize them all.
The heads once safe, the mean and heartless crowd
With ease may be dispers'd.

Mag. What you propose
Wears a successful face, were it as innocent
An act of such outrageous profanation,

May check the thoughts e'en of our closest friends,
And make them start from an abhor'd alliance,
That draws the vengeance of the gods upon them.
But more I fear the superstitious vulgar,
Who, tho' unknowing what religion means,
Yet nothing moves them more than zealous rage
For it's defence, when they believe it violated.

Mir. My caution shall obviate all thy fears;
We will give out that they themselves design'd
To fire the temple, and then kill the king.
No matter, tho' it seems not very probable;
More monstrous tales have oft amus'd the vulgar.

Mag. I yield to your direction; and to strengthen
The enterprise, will secretly dispose
A party of my own within the temple,
To join with yours.

Mir. It joys my heart to think
That I shall glut my vengeance on this Memnon;
That I shall see him strive in vain, and curse
The happy fraud that caught him.

ACT III.

SCENE, A Garden belonging to Mirza's Palace.

Cleone is discovered lying on a Bank of Flowers,
Beliza attending.

SONG.

UPON a shady bank repos'd,
Philanthé, amorous young, and fair,
Sighing, to the groves disclos'd
The story of her care.

The vocal groves give some relief,
While they her notes return;
The waters murmur o'er her grief,
And Echo seems to mourn.

A swain, that heard the nymph complain,
In pity of the fair,
Thus kindly strove to cure her pain,
And ease her mind of care.

'Tis just that love should give you rest,
From love your torments came;
Take that warm cordial to your breast,
And meet a kinder flame.

How wretched must the woman prove,
(Beware, fair nymph, beware!)

Whose folly scorns another's love,

And courts her own despair!

Cle. Oh love! thou bane of an unhappy maid!

Still art thou busy at my panting heart!

Still dost thou melt my soul with thy soft images,

And make my ruin pleasing! Fondly I try,

By gales of sighs, and floods of streaming tears,

To vent my sorrows and assuage my passions:

Still fresh supplies renew th' exhausted stores.

Love reigns my tyrant, to himself alone

He vindicates the empire of my breast,

And banishes all thoughts of joy for ever.

Bel. Why are you still thus cruel to yourself?

Why do you feed and cherish the disease,

That preys on your dear life? How can you hope

To find a cure for love in solitude?

Why rather chuse you not to shine at court;

And in a thousand gay diversions there,

To lose the memory of this wretched passion?

Cle. Alas, Beliza! thou hast never known

The fatal power of a restless love:

Like that avenging guilt that haunts the impious,

In vain we hope by flying to avoid it;

In courts and temples it pursues us still,

And in the loudest clamours will be heard:

It grows a part of us, lives in our blood,
And every beating pulse proclaims it's force.
Oh! think not then that I can shun myself;
The grave can only hide me from my sorrows.

Bel. Allow me then at least to share your griefs;
Companions in misfortunes make them less;
And I could suffer much to make you easy.

Cle. Sit by me, gentle maid; and while I tell
A wretched tale of unregarded love,
If thou, in kind compassion of my woes,
Shalt sigh, or shed a tear for my mishap,
My grateful eyes shall pay it back with interest.
Help me to rail at my too easy heart,
That rashly entertain'd this fatal guest:
And you, my eyes, why were you still impatient
Of any other sight but Artaxerxes?

Why did you make my woman's heart acquainted
With all the thousand graces and perfections,
That dress the lovely hero up for conquest?

Bel. Had you oppos'd this passion in it's infancy,
Ere time had given it strength, it might have dy'd,

Cle. That was the fatal error that undid me:
My virgin thoughts, and unexperient'd innocence,
Found not the danger till it was too late.

And tho' when first I saw the charming prince,
I felt a pleasing motion at my heart,
Short-breathing sighs heav'd in my panting breast,
I thought him, sure, the wonder of his kind,
And wish'd my fate had giv'n me such a brother:
Yet knew not that I lov'd, but thought that all,
Like me, beheld and bless'd him for his excellence.

Bel. Sure never hopeless maid was curs'd before,
With such a wretched passion; all the gods
Join to oppose your happiness; 'tis said,
This day the prince shall wed the fair Amestris.

Cle. No, my Beliza, I have never known
The pleasing thoughts of hope: certain despair
Was born at once, and with my love increas'd.
Thou nam'd'st the fair Amestris, did'st thou not?

Bel. Madam, I did.

Cle. I envy not her happiness;
Tho' sure few of our sex are blessed like her
In such a godlike lord.

Wou'd I had been a man!
With honour then I might have fought his friend-
Perhaps from long experience of my faith, [ship;
He might have lov'd me better than the rest.

Amidst the dangers of the horrid war,
Still had I been the nearest to his side;

In courts and triumphs still had shar'd his joys.

Or when the sportful chace had call'd us forth,

Together had we cheer'd our foaming steeds,

Together press'd the savage o'er the plain;

And when o'er-labour'd with the pleasing toil,

Stretch'd on the verdant soil had slept together,

But whither does my roving fancy wander?

These are the sick dreams of fantastick love.

Bel. Madam, Prince Artaban.

Cle. My cruel stars!

Do you then envy me my very solitude?

But death, the wretch's only remedy,

Shall hide me from your hated light for ever.

Enter Artaban.

Art. Ah, lovely mourner! still, still wilt thou
My eager love with inauspicious tears? [blast

When at thy feet I kneel, and sue for pity,

Or justly of thy cold regards complain,

Still wilt thou only answer me with sighs?

Cle. Alas! my lord, what answer can I give?

If still I entertain you with my grief,

Pity the temper of a wretched maid,

By nature sad, and born the child of sorrow:

In vain you ask for happiness from me,

Who want it for myself.

Art. Can blooming youth,
And virgin innocence, that knows not guilt,
Know any cause for grief?
The god of love stands ready with his torch
To light it at thy eyes, but still in vain;
For ere the flames can catch, 'tis drown'd in tears.
Forbear to argue with that angel face,
Against the passion thou wert form'd to raise.
The Paphian goddess frowns at thy delay;
By her fair self, and by her son the sweets,
Thy beauties are devoted to her service.
Lo! now she shoots her fires into my breast,
She urges my desires, and bids me seize thee,

[Taking her hand and kissing it.]

And bear thee as a victim to her altar:
Then offer up ten thousand thousand joys,
As an amends for all thy former coldness.

Cle. Forbear, my lord; or I must swear to fly
For ever from your sight.

Cast round your eyes on our gay eastern courts,
Where smiling beauties, born to better fate,
Give joy to the beholders;
There bless some happy princess with your vows,
And leave the poor Cleone to her sorrows.

Art. What queens are those of most celestial form,
Whose charms can drive thy image from my heart?
Oh! were they cast in nature's fairest mould,
Brighter than Cynthia's shining train of stars,
I swear I would prefer thee, O Cleone,
Would chuse to languish and to die for thee,
Much rather than be blest, and live for them!

Cle. Oh, prince! it is too much; nor am I worthy
The honour of your passion, since 'tis fix'd
By certain and unalterable fate,
That I can never yield to a return:
My thoughts are all to chaste Diana vow'd,
And I have sworn to die a virgin votary.

Art. Impossible! thou canst not give away
Mine and thy father's right, e'en to the gods:
Diana will disown th' unjust donation,
Nor favour such an injury to love.
To every power divine I will appeal,
Nor shall thy beauty bribe 'em to be partial.
Their altars now expect us; come, fair saint;
And if thou wilt abide their righteous doom,
Their justice must decree my happiness,
Reward my sufferings, and my flame approve,
For they themselves have felt the power of love.

[Exit.]

SCENE, The Temple of the Sun.

Enter Artaxerxes, Amestris, and Attendants.

Art. 'Tis done! 'tis done! Oh, let me find some
To tell the mighty joy that fills my breast, [way
Left I grow mad with height of furious bliss.
The holy priest has ty'd the sacred knot,
And my Amestris now is all my own.
Oh, thou soft charmer! thou excelling sweetness!
Why art thou not transported all like me?
I swear thou dost not love thy Artaxerxes,
If thou art calm in this excess of happiness.

Am. Alas! my lord, my panting heart yet trem-
Somewhat methinks there is [bles;

That checks my soul, and says I was too bold
To quit the pleasures of my virgin state,
To barter 'em for cares and anxious love.

Art. These are the fears which wait on ev'ry
And only serve for preludes to her joys; [bride,
Short sighs, and all those motions of thy heart,
Are nature's call, and kindle warm desires.
Soon as the friendly goddess of the night
Shall draw her veil of darkness o'er thy blushes,
These little, cold, unnecessary doubts,

Shall fly the circle of my folding arms.

Enter Memnon.

*My father! Is there an increase of joy?
What can ye give, ye gods, to make it more?*

Mem. Ye blessings of my age! Whom, when I
The memory of former woes is lost. [view,
Oh, prince! well has this glorious day repay'd
My youth and blood spent in Artaxerxes' service.
Nor had the gods indulg'd my vainest wishes,
Durst I have ask'd for such a son as you are.
But I am roughly bred, in words unknowing,
Nor can I phrase my speech in apt expression,
To tell how much I love and honour you:
Might I but live to fight one battle for you,
Tho' with my life I bought the victory,
Tho' my old battered trunk were hew'd to pieces,
And scatter'd o'er the field, yet should I bless
My fate, and think my years wound up with ho-
nour.

Art. Doubt not, my noble father, but e'en yet
A large remain of glory is behind,
When civil discord shall be root'd out,
And all the noise of faction hush'd to peace:
Rough Greece alike in arts and arms severe,
No more shall brand the Persian name with softness,
Athens and Sparta wond'ring, shall behold us,
Strict in our discipline, undaunted, patient
Of war's stern toil, and dread our hostile virtue.
Those stubborn common-wealths, that proudly durst
Disdain the glorious monarch of the east,
Shall pay their homage to the throne of Cyrus:
And when with laurels cover'd we return,
My love shall meet, and smiling bless our triumph,
While at her feet I lay the sceptres of the world!

Mem. Oh, glorious theme! By Heav'n, it fires
my age,
And kindles youth again in my cold veins.

Art. Ha! Mirza and the queen! Retire, my fair;
Ungentle hate and brawling rage shall not
Disturb the peace, to which this happy day
Is doubly sacred. Forward to the altar.

[Exit Artaxerxes, Amestris, Memnon, and Attendants.]

Enter at the other Door, Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.

Mir. All are dispos'd, and fate but waits our or-
For a deciding blow. [dies]

Queen. Your caution was
Both wise and faithful, not to trust my son
Too rashly with a secret of this nature;
The youth, tho' great of soul, and fond of glory,
Yet leans to the fantastick rules of honour,
Would hesitate at such an act as this,
Tho' future empire should depend upon it.

Mir. When time shall add experience to that
knowledge,

With which his early youth is richly fraught,
He'll be convinc'd that only fools would lose

A crown for notional principles.
Honour is the unthinking soldier's boast,
Whose dull head cannot reach those finer arts,
By which mankind is govern'd.

Queen. And yet it gives a lustre to the great,
And makes the crowd adore 'em.

Mir. Your son shall reap
The whole advantage, while we bear the guilt:
You, Madam, when the sacred hymns are finish'd,
Must with the prince retire; our foes when seiz'd,
Within the temple may be best secur'd,
Till you dispose their fate.

Queen. The rites attend us;
[Solemn musick is heard]
This day my son is monarch of the east.

THE AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

11

*Mir. Lend us, ye gods, your temples but this day,
You shall be paid with ages of devotion;
And after this, for ever undisturb'd;
Brood o'er your smoking altars.*

*Exeunt Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.
The Scene opening, shows the Altar of the Sun, Magas, and several other Priests attending. Solemn Musick is heard; then enter on one Side Memnon, Artaxerxes, Amestris, and Attendants; on the other Side the Queen, Mirza, Artaban, Cleone, Cleuthides, and Attendants. They all bow towards the Altar, and then range themselves on each Side of the Stage, while the following Hymn is performed in Parts, and Chorus by the Priests.*

H Y M N to the Sun.

Hail, Light, that doubly glads our sphere,
O glory and triumph of the year!
Hail, festival, for ever blest'd,
By the adoring, ravish'd cast!
Chorus, &c.

All the dependent spheres above,
By thy direction shine and move:
All purer beings here below,
From thy immediate essence flow.
What is the soul of man, but light,
Drawn down from thy transcendent height?
What but an intellectual beam;
A spark of thy immortal flame!
Chorus, &c.

Hail, Osofnades, pow'r divine!
Permit us to approach thy shrine;
Permit thy votaries to raise
Their grateful voices to thy praise.
Thou art the father of our kings,
The stem whence their high lineage springs;
The sovereign lord, that does maintain
Their uncontroll'd and boundless reign.

Oh, then assist thy drooping son,
Who long has grac'd our Persian throne!
Oh, may he yet extend his sway!
We yet Arfaces' rule obey!
Chorus, &c.

[When the musick is ended, Memnon, Artaxerxes, Queen, Artaban, &c. go off as they entered, severally; only Mirza comes forward, and the scene shuts; he looks after Amestris going out, and then speaks.]

Mir. What means this foreign warmth within my breast?

Is this a time for any thought but vengeance?
That fatal beauty dazzles my weak sense,
And blunts the resolution of my soul.
Feeble Mirza!

Canst thou give way to dotage, and become
The jest of fools? No! 'tis impossible:
Revenge shall rouse,
E'en thy whole soul—it wou't be: Amestris
Still rises uppermost in all my thoughts,
The master-piece of nature. The boy-god
Laughs at my rage, and triumphs o'er my folly.

[A tumultuous noise is heard.]

Ha! by the gods, 'tis doing! Now, my stars,
Be kind, and make me matter of my with at once.

Enter Magas.

But see, the priest—Why dost thou stare and tremble?
Have we succeeded?—say, and ease my fears.

*Mag. My soul is pierc'd with horror! Every god
Seems from his shrine to threaten us with vengeance.
The temple reels, and all it's pond'rous roof
Nods at the profanation.*

Mir. Base and fearful!

Canst thou, who wouldst be great, be superstitious?
But 'tis the coward's vice. Say, are our enemies
secur'd?

Mag. They are; the prince, old Memnon, and his daughter,

*Are in Orchaes' hands; only Tigranes
With some of lesser note are fled.*

*Mir. No matter:
These are the foul, the rest a lifeless mass,
Not worth our apprehension.*

*Mag. Will you stay,
To meet the furious thunder of their rage?*

*Mir. I will: thou may'st retire, and summon
Thy scatter'd spirits: let not the crowd see [back
Thy fears; 'twill make thee vile and cheap among
'em. *[Exit Mag.]**

*Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Amestris, prisoners.
Orchaes and Guards.*

*Art. Slave! Villain! Answer—say—how hast
To do this insolence? *[thou dar'd**

*Orch. I know my orders,
Which from the queen my mistress I receiv'd,
Who will avow her own authority. *[impossible?**

*Art. Ha! from the queen! She durst not, 'tis
'Tis sacrilege! 'tis treason! 'tis damnation!
Am I not Artaxerxes? Born to empire,
The next degree to gods? O thou bright Sun,
That roll'st above, the object of our worship,
Canst thou behold, and not avenge thy race?
Thy injur'd race? If I could aught admit
Unworthy of thy great original,
Let me be doom'd to fall this villain's slave.
If not, why am I made the scorn of wretches?*

*Mem. See where the master-villain stands! Un-
And harden'd in impiety; he laughs *[mov'd*
At the fictitious justice of the gods, *[him-
And thinks their thunder has not wings to reach
But know, the joy thy triumph brings is short:
My fate, in the gods govern, or at least, *[lice.
My mind's beyond thy reach, and scorns thy ma-
Mir. Dull, valiant fool, thy ruin is the least,
The most ignoble triumph of my wit.
Cleander's blood asks for substantial vengeance:
And curse thyself; curse the ill-omen'd day
That gave thee birth: renouncing all the gods,
Thyself of them renounc'd, shalt sink to hell
In bitterest pangs; and mingle with the furies.***

*Mem. Unhallow'd dog, thou ly'st! The utmost
Of all thy study'd malice cannot move me; *[force
And if the gods in trial of my virtue,
Can yield my life up to the hangman's mercy,
I'll shew thee with what ease the brave and honest
Can put off life, till thou shalt damn thy arts,
Thy wretched arts, and impotence of malice!**

*Mir. Rest well assur'd, thou shalt have cause to
The philosophick force of passive virtue. *[try**

*Art. Oh, death to greatness! Can we fall so low,
To be the slavish object of my mirth?
Ha! my Amestris!*

*My love! my royal bride! The spoiler, grief,
Defaces every feature: like the deluge
That raz'd the beauties of the first creation—
I cannot bear it—Villains, give me way—
*[He breaks from the guards that hold him, and catches
hold of Amestris.]**

*Oh! let me hold thee in my throbbing bosom,
And strive to hide thy sorrows from my sight:
I cannot see thy griefs; and yet I want
The pow'r to bring relief!*

*Am. Ah! no, my prince;
There are no remedies for ills like ours;
My helpless sex by nature stands expos'd
To all the wrongs and injuries of fortune;*

Defenceless in myself, you were my refuge,
The honour, joy, and safety of Amestris!
Oh, my Artaxerxes!
One influence guides our consenting stars,
And still together we are bless'd or curs'd.

Mir. Oods might behold her, and forget their wisdom. *[Aside.]*

But I delay too long, Orphanes, lend thy ear.

[Mirza whispers Orphanes, and exits.]

Mem. My children, you are still my joy and happiness;

Why am I made your curse? This hated head,
To death devoted, has involv'd your innocence
In my destruction.

[Guards lay bold on Artaxerxes and Amestris.]

Am. Alas! my father!

Art. Barbarous dogs! what mean you?

Orch. Convey the lady to Lord Mirza's palace,
'Tis the queen's will she shall be there confin'd,

Art. Thou canst not mean so damn'd a villainy!
Thou dar'st not, shalt not part us; Fate can't do it.

Mem. Cursed old age! why have I liv'd to see this?
Oh, my children!

Orch. Force them asunder.

Art. Hew off my limbs, ye dogs, I will not loose
My wife, my lov'd Amestris— *[Em—]*

Am. My lord, my husband!—

[Orphanes and one party of the guards force Artaxerxes and Memnon off one way, and the other party bears Amestris another.]

Re-enter Mirza.

Mir. This was most noble mischief! it stung
'Twas luxury of vengeance— home—
Now to the rest; this prince, this husband, dies:
To-morrow's dawn brings his and Memnon's fate.
This night let them despair, and ban, and rage,
And to the wooden-deities within *[singly]*
Tell frantic tales: my hours shall pass more pleas-
If love (which yet I know not) can give pleasure.
One night I safely may indulge in riot;
I will grow young and surfeit on her charms,
Her luscious sweets; then rising from her arms,
The nauseous, momentary joy forget,
And be myself again; again be wise and great.

ACT IV.

SCENE, The Palace.

Enter Artaban and Cleantes.

Art. **T**IS base and impious! where are the
ties
Shall keep mankind in order, if religion
And publick faith be violated? 'Tis an injury
That beards both gods and men; and darts their
justice.

Clean. The fearful crowd already take th' alarm,
Break off their solemn sports, their songs and dances,
And wildly in tumultuous concert join:
Mischief and danger sit in every face,
And while they dread the anger of the gods,
The wise, who know th' effects of popular fury,
From them expect that vengeance which they fear.

Art. The sacred power of majesty, which should
Forbid, owns and protects the violence.
It must not, shall not be: who steals a crown
By arts like these, wears it unworthily.

Clean. The queen your mother, Sir, she will ex-
You should approve that act her power has done. *[peet]*

Art. I'll meet her as I budge, and show myself
Worthy the noble rivalship of empire.

Enter the Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.

Queen. My son, I come to joy you of a crown
And glory, certain now: Your fate at length
Has master'd that malignant influence
With which it struggled long: you are a king,
The greatest that our eastern world beholds;
And tho' my widow'd bed be cause for grief,
Yet for thy sake, my son, I joy to say
His races is no more.

Art. Peace to his ashes, and eternal fame
Dwell with his memory; while we who live
Look back with emulation on his greatness,
And with laborious steps strive to ascend
That height where once he sat.

Queen. Thou hast already
Attain'd the lofty summit of his glory;
His throne expects thee but to sit and fill it.

Art. No, Madam; when the gods chuse worthy
subjects

On whom to place such greatness, they surround
The glorious prize with toil and thorny danger,
And bid the man who would be great, dare greatly.
Be it for dull elder brothers to possess
Without deserving; mine's a nobler claim:
Nor will I taste the god-like joys of power,
Till men and gods with justice shall confess
'Tis barely the reward of what I merit.

Queen. What means my son?

Art. To wrestle for a crown.

Queen. With what fantastick shadow wouldst thou
The haughty rival of thy hopes is fall'n; *[strive]*
He lives indeed, but 'tis to grace thy triumph,
And bow before thee; then he swept away
Like the remembrance of an idle dream,
Which tho' of yesternight, is now forgotten.

Art. It grieves me much to say, my royal mother,
I cannot take a crown upon these terms,
Tho' e'en from your hands: the conscious virtue
That witnesses within my breast for glory,
Points me to greatness by the paths of honour,
And urges me to do as a king ought,
That would not wear his purple as the gift
Of impious treachery and base deceit.

Queen. Amazement turns my senses! or, I dream!
For sure thou canst not mean so poor a folly.
Can my son think so meanly? Go, set free
(Since honour bids) this lordly elder brother,
Bow like a slave before him, wait his pleasures,
And live dependant on his scanty pension:
He may reward thy servile loyalty,
And make thee ruler of some petty province,
In recompence of royalty giv'n up.

Art. No; (tho' I must confess I would not hold
Caught in a villain's snare) yet to death *[him]*
I still defy him as my mortal foe.

And since my father's fate dissolves that truce
To which I stood engag'd, 'tis war again.
Amidst the steely squadrons will I seek
This haughty brother by his friends surrounded,
And back'd with all the advantage of his birth;
Then bravely prove upon him with my sword,
He falsely brands me for a bookish coward,
That nature's error only gave him preference,
Since fate meant me the king.

Queen. A mother's care is watchful for thy safety,
Else wert thou lost, thou honourable fool:
Long might'st thou vainly hunt in bloody fields
For that advantage which thy willing fortune
Now reaches to thy hands: seize her now,
While she is thine, or she is lost for ever.

Art. No matter, let her fly; the eagle Virtue
Shall soar beyond her, and command her flight:
Fortune is not my mistress, but my slave.

Posterity, that reads the name of Artaban

In the records of empire, shall not blush

To think I plotted with a knavish priest,

The scandal of his venerable function,

To betray a prince my enemy:

Let the abhor'd and impious treachery

Obscurely die unknown to future ages;

Or if our shame must be deliver'd down,

By all the kingly hopes that fire my soul,

If shall not pass without a brand of punishment.

You, madam, are my mother: nature blinds me,

And bids me see no faults in her that bore me;

Those other slaves that dare——

Queen. May be immortal,

For aught that thou canst do to cause their fate.

Mistaken youth!

Think'st thou that I, whose soul was form'd for sway,

Would lay the golden reins of empire down?

Or trust them to the guidance of a boy,

Who shall dispose of me, or those that serve me,

According to the dictates of old morals,

His bearded tutor gleams from musty authors?

Artab. Nay, then, 'tis time I should exert myself;

And tho' you gave me birth, yet from the gods

(Who made my father be as he was, royal,

And stamp'd the mark of greatness on my soul)

I claim my right to empire: may I fall

Vile and forgotten, if I ever own

Any superior being but those gods.

Queen. Thou rav'st, and hast forgot me.

Artab. No; you are

My mother, and a woman, form'd to obey;

On that condition all the sex's privileges

Are founded: the creating hand has mix'd

Softness and beauty in your composition,

To charm and bend the mind of man, impatient

Of the ignoble pleasure; you were made for

The weakness and necessities of nature:

Ill are your feeble souls for greatness suited:

Desire of government is monstrous in you.

Queen. Thou mighty goddess, Nature! dost thou

This rebel son? this insolent upbraider,

Still fondly nurs'd in my indulgent bosom?

To build whose future greatness to the skies,

My anxious soul has labour'd more than when

I felt a mother's sorrow for his birth:

Ungrateful boy!——

Did not a mother's fondness plead hard for thee,

Thy head should pay the forfeit of thy insolence;

For know, young king, that I am fate in Persia,

And life and death depend upon my pleasure.

Artab. The world would be well govern'd, should

Depute their providence to women's care, [the gods

And trust them with the fate of kings and empires.

Queen. Away! nor tempt me farther.

The patience e'en of gods themselves has limits,

Yet if thou still persist to dare my power,

Like them, I may be urg'd to loose my vengeance,

And tho' thou wert my creature, strike thee dead.

Mr. Beseech you, Sir, retire; the queen your

Labours with wisest foresight for your good, [mother,

And is incens'd to see you thwart that purpose.

Artab. What is the good of greatness, but the

Madam, I leave you; my own innate virtue [power?

Arms me against your rage, unjust and impotent:

Wait but the great success my soul divines;

And you will own your little juggling arts

Have only serv'd to obstruct a while my glory,

And screen this elder brother from my conquest.

[Exit Artaban and Cleantes.

Mr. Madam, let me intreat you, by the gods,

To calm your just resentments.

The prince led on by this pernicious honour,

May set the prisoners free; think, if that happen,

To what a shock of fate we stand expos'd.

Queen. 'Tis true; this foolish honour ruins all.

Say then, wife lord, and let thy ready wit,

Still present to itself, avert this blow.

Mir. One method, tho' ungentle, yet remains

To remedy the fears this ill produces:

This instant let a guard confine the prince,

Ere he can gain the means t' affect that mischief

He meditates against himself and us:

To-morrow, early as the morning dawns,

The prisoners all shall die; that once dispatch'd,

This raging fit of honour will relax,

And give him leisure to consider coolly

Th' advantage of his fortune.

Queen. You have reason!

And tho' I fear his haughty temper will

But badly brook confinement, he must learn

To bear it as he can: perhaps 'twill bend him,

And make his youth more pliant to my will.

Mir. Your orders cannot be dispatch'd too soon,

Each minute of the flying hours is precious.

Queen. The Eunuch Bagoas, let him attend us!

He shall receive instructions on the instant.

[Exit the Queen and Mirza, severally.

SCENE, Mirza's Palace.

Enter Cleone in a Man's Habit with a dark Lanthorn,

Beliza following.

Cle. Ye gentle powers, who view our cares with

Lend your compassion to the poor Amestris. [pity,

Oh, my Beliza! was not thy soul wounded,

To hear (when now we pass'd by her apartment)

The piercing accents of her loud complainings?

By Heav'n, my aching heart bleeds for her sufferings.

Bel. 'Tis sure she feels the bitterest pangs of woe;

And were not all my thoughts to you devoted,

Her grief would deeply sink into my soul.

Why will you tempt alone ten thousand dangers?

Your father's and the furious queen's resentment;

The cruel guards, and all those fatal accidents,

Which in the horror of this dreadful night,

Might shake the resolution of a man.

Cle. Pr'ythee, no more, thou know'st I am re-

And all thy kind advice is urg'd in vain; [solv'd,

Thy fond mistaken fears present the danger

More dreadful than it is: this master-key

Admits me through that passage to the temple,

By which the guards, who seiz'd the unhappy prince

This morning, enter'd; that of all the rest

Is only left unguarded, and from thence,

Assisted by the friendly veil of night,

We may conduct him thro' my father's palace

In safety to the street: there undistinguish'd

Amongst the busy discontented crowd,

That swarm in murmuring heaps, he may retire:

Nor shall my father or the queen e'er know

The pious fraud my love was guilty of.

Bel. Yet still I fear——

Cle. No more, retire, and leave me;

My drooping heart sits lighter than it's wont,

And cheerfully presages good success.

Bel. Where shall I wait you?

Cle. At my own apartment.

Bel. The mighty gods protect you.

Cle. Softly: retire. [Exit Beliza.

What noise was that?—The creature of my fears.

In vain, fond maid, wouldst thou bestir thy sex,

Thy coward soul confesses thee a woman.

A foolish, rash, fond woman! where am I going?

To save my god-like hero. What if I fail?

Then death is in my reach, and ends my sorrows.

[Shewing a dagger.

Why dost thou shake, my hand, and fear to grasp

This instrument of fate? If I succeed,
Yet Artaxerxes will not live for me;
And my despair will want thy friendly aid:
Death ev'ry way shuts up my gloomy prospect.

[Exit Cleone.]

Night Scene of the Temple of the Sun.

Enter Memnon and Artaxerxes.

Art. Still 'tis in vain! this idle rage is vain;
And yet my swelling passions will have way;
Why rather was I not a peasant slave,
Bred from my birth a drudge to your creation,
And to ray destin'd load inur'd betimes?

Mem. The malice of our fate were not compleat,
Had we not been by just degrees to happiness
Rais'd, only to be plung'd the deeper down
In an abyss of woes. Early success
Met and attended all my youthful wars;
Then was the day of joyous triumph, then
My soul was lifted high, ev'n to the stars. [fortune]
But now—what am I now? O damn'd reverse of
Now, when my age would be indulg'd in ease,
And joy in pleasure of my former fame,
Now I am curs'd; held at a villain's mercy,
My foes derision, and the scorn of cowards!

Art. Oh, torture of my soul! damn'd racking
thought!

Am not I too reserv'd for servile vassalage?
To be the subject of a boy's command?
No; my disdainful soul shall struggle out,
And start at once from it's dishonour'd mansion!

Mem. Oh, royal thought! nor shall they keep
back death,

Altho' it's common means be not in reach.
Shall my old soldier's outside, rough and hardy,
Scarr'd o'er with many an honourable mark,
Be gag'd for publick scorn! Shall Mirza tell me,
Thus didst thou once, and now thou art my slave;
My foot shall spurn thee, tread upon thy neck,
And trample in the dust thy silver hairs!
Shall I not rather choak, hold in my breath,
Or smear some wall or pillar with my brains!

Art. Rage, or some god, shall save us from dishonour.

But oh, my father! can we take our flight,
Tho' to the stars, and leave my love behind!
Where is she now? Where is my queen, my bride,
My charmer, my Amestris!

Mem. Speak not of her.

Art. Not speak!

Mem. Nor think of her, if possible.

Art. Was she not snatch'd, was she not
Torn from my panting bosom (yet I live!)
E'en on our bridal-day?

To lose her then! Oh! —

And yet you bid me think of her no more!

Mem. I do; for the bare mention turns my brain,
And even now I border upon madness;
So dreadful is the very apprehension
Of what may be.

Art. H! whither wouldst thou drive me!

Mem. Did you, like me, consider that dog Mirza,
Early to hell devoted, and the furies,
Born, nurs'd, and bred a villain, you would fear
The worst effects his malice could express
On virtue which he hates, when in his power.

Art. What is the worst?

Mem. What my old faltering tongue
Trembles to utter; goatish lust and rape!

Art. Ha! rape! if there are gods, it is impossible.

Mem. O! a dreadful image for a father's thought!
To have his only child, her sex's boast,
The joy of sight, and comfort of his age,
Dragg'd by a villain slave, to some remote dark cell,

A scene for horror fit, there to be blotted
By his foul loss,

Let me grow savage first, let this old hand
That oft has blest'd her, in her blood be drench'd;
Let me behold her dead, dead at my foot,
To spare a father's greater shame and sorrow!

Art. A father! What's a father's plague to mine?
A husband and a lover! If it can be,
If there is such a hoarded curse in store,
Transfix me now, ye gods, now let your thunder
Fall on my head, and strike me to the center!

Enter Cleone with a dark Lantern and Key.

Cle. This way the echoing accents seem to come;
Sure 'tis the wretched prince!
Is this, alas!
The state of Artaxerxes, Persia's heir?
Not one poor lamp to cheer the dismal shade
Of this huge holy dungeon!
I'll shew myself.

[She turns the light, and comes towards Artaxerxes and Memnon.]

Mem. Ha! whence this gleam of light?

Art. Fate is at hand, let's haste to bid it wel-
It brings an end of wretchedness. [come]

Cle. Speak lower;

I am a friend: long live Prince Artaxerxes!

Art. What wretch art thou, that hail'st me with
a curse?

Come from that cloud that muffles up thy face;
And if thou hast a dagger, shew it boldly:
We wish to die.

Cle. Think better on my errand;
I bring you blessings, liberty and life,
And come the minister of happier fate.

[Turns the light on herself.]

Now down, my blood, down to my trembling heart,
Nor sparkle in my visage to betray me. [Aside]

Art. Ha! as I live, a boy! a blushing boy!
Thou wert not form'd sure for a murderer's office;
Speak then, and tell me what and whence thou art.

Cle. Oh, seek not to unveil a trivial secret,
Which known, imports you not. I am a youth
Abandon'd to misfortunes from my birth,
And never knew one cause to joy in life,
But this that puts it in my power to save
A prince like Artaxerxes. Ask no more,
But follow thro' the mazes that I tread,
Until you find your safety.

Art. Thus forbidding,
Thou giv'st me cause t' enquire: are then the guards
That when the day went down, with strictest watch
Observ'd the temple gates, remov'd or fled?

Cle. They are not; but with numbers reinforce
Keep every passage; only one remains
Thro' Mirza's palace, open to our flight.

Mem. Ha! Mirza! there's damnation in his name
Ruin, deceit, and treachery attend it;
Can life, can liberty or safety, come
From him, or aught, that has an interest in him?
Rather, suspect this feigning boy his instrument,
To plunge us deeper yet, if possible,
In misery.

Cle. Unfortunate suspicion! what shall I say
To urge 'em to be safe, and yet preserve
My wretched self unknown? [Aside]

Yet hear me, prince, since you suspect me sent
By Mirza, to ensnare you, know I serve [daughters]
(Oh, gods! to what aim I reduc'd! [Aside])—
Some god compassionate of your woes has stirr'd
A woman's pity in her softer breast;
And 'tis from her I come to give you liberty.

I beg you to believe me.

[She weeps]

Art. See, the weaps!

THE AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

15

Art. His daughter, say'st thou? I have seen the maid.

Does thou serve her; and could she send thee to me? 'Tis an unlikely riddle.

Mem. Perhaps 'tis meant,
That she who shares his poisonous blood, shall share
The pleasure of his vengeance.

But thou, her instrument, begone; and say,
The fate of princes is not sport for girls.

Cl. I grieve, my lord to find your hard suspicion
Debars me from preserving your dear life,
(Which not your own Amestris wishes more.)
To-morrow's dawn (Oh! let me yet prevail)
The cruel queen resolves shall be your last.
Oh, fly! let me conjure you, save yourself.
May that most awful god that here is worshipp'd
Deprive me of his cheerful beams for ever,
Make me the wretched 'st thing he sees while living,
If I have any thought but for your safety.

Art. No, I have found the malice of thy mistress;
Since I refus'd her love when she was proffer'd
By her ambitious father for my bride,
And on a worthier choice bestow'd my heart,
She vows revenge on me for slighted beauty.

Cl. My lord, you do her most unmanly wrong;
She owns the merit of the fair Amestris,
Nor ever durst imagine she deserv'd you.
Oh! spare that thought, nor blot her virgin fame.
In silence still she wonder'd at your virtues,
Bless'd you, nor at her own ill fate repin'd;
This wounds her most, that you suspect unkindly
Th' officious piety that would have sav'd you.
Careless of an offended father's rage,
For you alone concern'd, she charg'd me guide you,
When midnight sleep had clos'd observing eyes,
Safely thro' his father's palace with this key——
And if I met with any that durst bar
Your passage forth, she bid me greet him thus——

[Stabs herself.

[*Artaxerxes catches her as she falls.*

Art. What hast thou done, rash boy?

Cl. Giv'n you the last,

And only proof remain'd, that could convince you
I held your life much dearer than my own.

Mem. Horrid amazement chills my freezing veins!

Cl. Let me conjure you with my latest breath,
Make haste to seize the means that may preserve
This key, amidst the tumult of this night, [you.

[Giving the key.

Will open you a way thro' Mirza's palace.

May every god assist and guard your flight:

And, oh! when all your hopes of love and glory

Are crown'd with just success, will you be good,

And think with pity on the lost Cleone!

Art. Ten thousand dismal fancies crown'd my
Oh! is it possible thou canst be she, [thoughts.

Thou most unhappy fair one!

Cl. Spare my shame,

Nor call the blood that flows to give me peace,

Back to my dying cheeks. Can you forget

Who was my father; and remember only

How much I wish'd I had deserv'd your friendship!

Nay, let my tongue grow bold, and say, your love!

But 'twas not in my fate.

Art. What shall I say,

To witness how my grateful heart is touch'd?

Why hast thou stain'd me with thy virgin blood?

I swear, sweet saint, for thee I could forgive

The malice of thy father.

Look up and live,

And thou shalt still be near me as my heart.

Cl. Oh, charming sounds, that gently tell my

To everlasting rest! I swear 'tis more, [soul

More joy to die thus bless'd, than to have liv'd
A monarch's bride! may every blessing wait you;
In war and peace, still may you be the greatest,
The favourite of the gods, and joy of men——
I faint—Oh, let me lean upon your arm——

[She dies.

Art. Ha! she swoons!

The iron hand of death is on her beauties.

And see, like lilies nipp'd with frost, they languish!

Mem. My tough old soldier's heart melts at the
And an unwonted pity moves my breast. [sight,
Ill-fated maid! too good for that damn'd race,
From which thou drew'st thy being! Sure the gods,
Angry, ere while will be at length appeas'd
With this egregious victim: let us tempt 'em
Now while they seem to smile.

Art. A beam of hope

Strikes thro' my soul, like the first infant light

That glanc'd upon the chaos; if we reach

The open city, fate may be ours again:

But oh! whate'er success or happiness

Attend my life, still fair unhappy maid,

Still shall thy memory be my grief and honour!

On one fix'd day in each returning year,

Cypress and myrtle for thy sake I'll wear;

E'en my Amestris thy hard fate shall mourn,

And with fresh roses crown thy virgin urn,

Till in Elysium bless'd thy gentle shade

Shall own my vows of sorrow justly paid. [Exeunt.

ACT V.

SCENE, *An Apartment in Mirza's Palace.*

Enter Amestris.

Am. WILL ye not hear, ye ever gracious gods?
(Since sure you do not joy in our mis-
fortunes,

But only try the strength of our frail virtue)

Are not my sorrows full? can aught be added?

My royal lord, and father! yet dear names

In which my all of happiness was summ'd,

What have the ministers of fate done with you?

Are you not dead? Too sure! that's past a doubt:

Oh, Memnon! Oh, my prince! my father! Oh,
my husband!

Enter Mirza.

Mir. Such Juno was (except alone those tears)

When, upon Ida's top she charm'd the god,

That long had been a stranger to her bed;

Made him forget the business of the world,

And lay aside his providence, t'employ

The whole divinity upon her beauty.

And sure 'twas worth the while; had I been Jove,

So had I too been pleas'd to be deceiv'd

Into immortal joys. O cease thy tears!

Am. Give 'em me back, or if the grave and thou

Restore to none, oh, join my fate to theirs!

Shut us together in some silent vault,

And hush my sorrows in eternal slumber.

Mir. In pity to your form, assuage those tears;

Sorrow is beauty's bane; nor let your breast

Harbour a fear: I wage not war with fair ones;

Let joy, the native of your soul, return,

And love's gay god sit smiling in your eyes,

As erst he did; I bring you joy and glory,

And would so fully recompense the loss

You fondly mourn, that when you count the gains,

Yourself should own your fortunes are well chang'd.

Am. Oh, impious comforter! talk'st thou of joy,

When nature dictates only death and horror?

Is there a god can break the laws of fate,

And give me back the precious lives I've lost?

What nam'st thou recompence? Can aught atone
For blood? A father's and a husband's blood!
Such comfort brings the hungry midnight wolf,
When having slain the shepherd, smear'd with gore,
He leaps amidst the helpless bleating flock.

Mir. Away with this perverseness of thy sex,
Look up, be gay, and cheer me with thy beauties,
And to thy wish I will indulge thy fancy.
Not all th' imagin'd splendor of the gods
Shall match thy pomp; sublimely shalt thou shine,
The boast and glory of our Asian world;
Nor shall one she of all thy tow'ring sex
Out-rival thee, thou lovely fair, in power.
Oh, think on power, on power and place supreme!
What if I talk'd of love?

Am. Of love! Oh, monster!

Mir. If love be monstrous, so is this fair frame,
This beauteous world, this canopy, the sky.
Oh, give me but to taste thy blissful charms,
And take my wealth, my honour, pow'r, take all,
All, all for recompence.

Am. Execrable wretch!

Thus, is it thus thou wouldst assuage my sorrows!
When thy inhuman bloody cruelty,
Now with redoubling pangs cleave my poor heart,
Com'st thou bespotted with the recent slaughter
To proffer impious love? accursed fiend!
Horror and grief shall turn me to a fury;
Still with my echoing cries I will pursue thee,
And hallow vengeance in thy guilty ears;
Think not, villain
Who art the plague and scourge of human-kind,
That there is peace for thee, whilst I run mad
With raging sorrow! Vengeance, vengeance waits
thee,

Great as my woes!

Mir. I am not lucky at the glossing art
Of catching girls with words; but 'tis no matter;
Force is a sure resort: and when at last
Fierce as a tow'ring falcon from her height,
I stoop to strike the prey, it is my own. [*Aside.*
Obstinate fool, how dar'st thou cross my wishes?
Thou' mercy, in compassion of thy beauty
Reach out her hand to save thee, yet, if I urg'd,
Revenge may still take place—think well on that.

Am. That, that is all the mercy which I ask;
Indulge thy thirsty malice in my blood,
And hasten me to peace.

Mir. Alas! thou hast not read aright thy destiny,
Master of much import requires thy life,
And still detains thee here. Come, I'll instruct
And put thee in the way of fate's design. [*thee,*

Am. Unhand me, villain!

Mir. Nay, you must not struggle,
Nor frown, and look askew: fantastick sex!
That put men on the drudgery to force you
To your own satisfaction.

Am. Let me go,
Abhor'd, detested monster! Shall he brave you,
You awful gods! shall not your lightning blast him!
Mir. Oh, no! your gods have pleasures of their
Some mortal beauty charms the wanton Jove, frown;
Within whose arms he revels, nor has leisure
To mind thy foolish raving.

Am. Hear me now, sweet Heaven!
Save me, ye gods! Oh save me! save me! save me!
Mir. Come, come along! you see you strive in
vain. [*Striving with her.*

Am. Is there no hope of aid from gods or men?
O, let me turn to thee then, kneel to thee,
And with my prayers and tears implore thy pity.

Mir. Speak, for enchantment dwells upon thy
tongue.

Am. What shall I say to move him to compassion?
Thus grovelling, prostrate thus upon the earth,
Let me conjure you, spare my virgin honour!
Kill me, the last of my unhappy race,
And let old Memnon's name with me be lost!

Mir. That tongue which pleads, makes all en-
treating vain,
I long to lose my age in thy embraces,
To bask and wanton in thy warmer sun
Till a new youth shoot thro' me.

Am. Chaste Diana,
And thou, the guardian of the marriage bed!

[*Getting loose from him.*
Thou, royal Juno, oh, protect thy votary!

Mir. I pry thee, yield; come, yield and be a
queen; [*Laying hold on her again.*
Yield, and be any thing. I cannot bear
These fierce convulsive starts, this raging flame
That drinks my blood.

Am. Oh, never, never, never.
To my last gasp, to death I will resist!

Mir. My coward strength,
Rouse, and deserve the pleasure thou wouldst taste.
Am. Unmanly traitor!—seize him, all ye fiends.
[*In the struggle she draws his own poniard, and
slabs him.*

Mir. [*Falling.*] Damnation! Oh, my heart! the
Has struck me to the earth. [*curled steel*

Am. There sink for ever;
Nor rise again to plague the wretched world.

Mir. My heated blood ebbs out, and now too late
My cooler reason bids me curse my folly.
Oh, idiot, idiot! to be caught so poorly!
My memory must be the jest of boys.

Am. My boasted courage sinks at sight of blood.
[*Mirza attempting to rise, falls again.*

Mir. It wou't be! Life gulches out amain,
And I shall die without revenge or aid.

[*Trampling without.*
What noise is that without there? Help!

Am. Oh, Heavens!
What will become of me?

[*Enter Orchanes hastily.*

Orch. My lord! Where are you? [*dent*
Bleeding! and on the ground! what wretched acci-
Then fate resolves to make this night compleat,
Such as succeeding horrors ne'er shall match.

Mir. Oh, my Orchanes! I am fallen vilely,
Methought thou talk'dst of horrors, speak 'em boldly
And try if aught can add to this confusion.

Orch. Prepare, my lord, and summon all your
wisdom,

Your utmost constancy of soul, to hear—
Mir. No more! I cannot wait thy preparation,
Let the ill fortune take me as it finds me.

Orch. Then hear it thus; your daughter's dead—
Mir. My daughter!

Thy words have met with an unguarded side,
And pierce e'en thro' my soul. Say, how? Where?
Tell me!

Orch. As with a guard I kept the temple-gates,
I heard old Memnon and the pris'ner prince
Loud as the roaring ocean in a storm,
When on a sudden, ere the night had gain'd
Four hours at most, the noise was hush'd in silence
Wond'ring, and curious of the cause, I enter'd,
And found (Oh, grief to fight!) your lovely daugh-
Dress'd like a boy, then warm, and newly dead. [*thee*
One wound was on her breast. Why she was thus
Or how, we know not; to compleat the ill,

THE AMBITIOUS STEPMOTHER.

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The prisoners both are dead.

Mirza—That is impossible. [not fly.]

Ha! Which way? Whither? How! They could

Oh!—Oh, where could turn of joy! Are they not

dead then? [Aside.]

Orch. They could not escape the golden no other

passage

Remain'd but yours, and even then was fast.

Upon the instant I beset each avenue

Which to your palace leads; happily yet

They are not pass'd from thence.

Am. Guard 'em, ye gods! [Aside.]

Mir. Find 'em again, Orchanes, ere I die,

Or I am more than doubly dam'd; this loss

Is worse than mine, worse than my daughter's death,

'Tis death of my revenge.

Is there; nature fails me! Oh, revenge!

Will not thy sword keep back dying life?

It shall! Orchanes, drag that traitress to me.

Am. Oh, if thou art a man, I charge thee loose

Save me from death. [me,

Have pity on my youth! oh, spare my youth!

[Orchanes pulls Ametris down to Mirza.

Mir. Hearken not to her; drag her, pull her

down!

Shall Memnon boast of thee, while I die childless?

No; to Cleone's ghost thou art a victim.

Die, witch; enchantress, die! [He flabs her.

Am. Ah! mercy, Heavens!

Mir. I thank thee, hand, at least for this last ser-

vice. Now fly, Orchanes, haste, and tell the queen, [vice,

My latest breath says for her—Something, I would

important to her service—I breathe short,

Life stays in pain, and struggles to be gone;

I strive in vain to hold it—Ha! what mean

These fleeting shades that dance before my sight?

'Tis death! I feel it plain; the dreadful change

That nature starts at, death!—Death!—What is

'Tis a vast disquisition: priests and scholars [death!

Enquire whole ages, and are yet in doubt.

My head turns round—I cannot form one thought

That pleases me about it—Dying—must resolve me.

[Mirza dies.

Am. Oh, my hard fortune! must I die? die now.

When Artaxerxes calls, and bids me live!

His dear lov'd image stays my parting soul,

And makes it linger in its ruin'd house.

Had I but strength, perhaps my fate may yet [Rising.

Find out a way to save me.

My love and father make life worth my care.

Alas! my blood flows fast: this way, I think,

[Goes off faintly.

Enter at the other Side Artaxerxes and Memnon, with

a Sword and Dark-lantern.

Mem. Ha! here are lights.

Art. And see, blood and a body on the floor!

What means this scene of death! what wretch art

Oh, all ye juster powers! 'tis Mirza, see, [thou?

He seems new dead.

Mem. Thy punishment then is new to him.

And if there be one deeper pit of sulphur,

One plague above the rest in those dark regions,

He, as the most abandon'd dog, may claim it,

And vie for preference with devils themselves.

This way, my prince, let us attempt.

[Exit, and return.

Re-enter Ametris.

Mem. We must return, we cannot pass that way.

Am. The doors are guarded, fate has clos'd me

Art. Ha! art thou my Ametris? [round.

Mem. Oh, my daughter! [They run to her.

Am. Are ye then come at last to bless my eyes,

which could not close without one parting view?

Oh, hold me, or I sink—

Mem. Alas! my child—

Art. My true fear! why art thou pale and faint?

Ha! whence this blood? Oh, killing spectacle!

Am. Eoath from my heart the crimson river flows;

My youth's heart, that hastily consumes

It's small remain of life. Oh, lay me gently

On my last bed the earth, whose cold had before

Must shortly be the place of my long rest.

Mem. What have we done? or, oh! if we have

finn'd,

What has thy innocence done to merit this!

Am. That villain Mirza—

Mem. Ha!

Am. Offer'd most brutal outrage to my honour.

Art. Oh, ye eternal rulers of the world!

Could you look on unmov'd? But say, instruct me!

That I may bow before the god that sav'd thee!

Am. Sure 'twas some chaster power that made me

And taught my trembling hand to find the way [bold;

With his own pohard to the villain's heart.

Mem. Thou art my daughter still! Oh, noble

That gives in death an interval of joy!

Am. Just in that hour of fate a villain enter'd,

By whose assistance the revengeful Mirza

Forc'd me to share death with him.

Art. Oh, thou soft dying sweetest!—shall I rage

And curse myself! curse e'en the gods!—Oh, no;

I am a slave of fate, and bow beneath

The load that presses me; am sunk to earth,

And ne'er shall rise again: here will I sit

And gaze till I am nothing.

Am. Alas! my lord,

Fain would I cheer your grief, but 'tis in vain:

I know by my own heart it is impossible;

For we have lov'd too well; indeed, 'tis hard,

'Tis very hard to part: I cannot leave you;

The agonizing thought distracts me; hold me,

Oh, hold me fast, death shall not tear me from you!

Art. O could my arms fence thee from destiny,

The gods might launch their thunder on my head,

Plague me with woes treble to what I feel:

With joy I would endure it all to save thee!

What shall I say, what shall I do to save thee!

Grief shakes my frame, it melts my very temples;

My manly constancy and royal courage

Run gushing thro' my eyes: Oh, my Ametris!

Am. And see my father! his white beard is wet

With the sad dew.

Mem. I try'd to man my heart,

But could not stand the buffet of this tempest.

It tears me up—my child! ha! art thou dying?

Am. Indeed I'm very sick! Oh, hold me up!

My pain increases, and a cold damp dew

Hangs on my face. Is there no help? no ease?

Have I your arm, my love?

Art. Thou hast! my heart,

Dost thou yet hold?

Am. Say, will you not forget me,

When I am laid to moulder in my tomb?

'Tis sure you will not, still there will be room

For my remembrance in your noble heart!

Now I faint.

Oh, shield me; shield me from that ugly phantom,

The cave of death! how dark and deep it is!

I tremble at the sight—'tis hideous horror!

The gloom grows o'er me—let me not lie there.

[Ametris dies.

Art. There life gave way, and the last rosy breath

Went in that sigh. Now for rest;

Old Memnon! Ha! grief has transfix'd his brain,

And he perceives me not—Now what of thee?

Think'st thou to live, thou wretch? Think not of any thing!

Thought is damnation; 'tis the plague of devils
To think on what they are. And see, this weapon
Shall shield me from it, plunge me in forgetfulness,
Ere the dire scorpion, thought, can rouse to sting me.
Lend me thy bosom, my cold bride: ill-fortune

[Lying by her.

Has done it's worst, and we shall part no more!
Wait for me, gentle spirit, since the stars
Together must receive us. [Stabs himself.] Oh,
How foolish is the coward's fear of death!
Of death, the greatest—surest way for peace.

[Artaxerxes dies.

[Memnon stands looking on the bodies some time,
and then speaks.

Mem. Yet will I gaze! yet, tho' my eyes grow stiff,
And farn to steel or marble. Here's a sight
To bless a father! these, these were your gifts,
Ye bounteous gods!
You gave me being too, and spun me out
To hoary wretchedness. Away! 'twas cruelty:
Oh, cursed, cursed, cursed fourscore years,
Ye heap of ills, ye monstrous pile of plagues!
Sure they lov'd well, the very streams of blood,
That flow from their pale bosoms, meet and mingle.
Stay, let me view 'em better—
If thou art like thy mother—she dy'd too—
Where is she?—Ha! that dog, that villain Mirza,
He bears her from me: shall we not pursue?—
The whirl of battle comes across me, fly;
Begone; they shall not, dare not brave me thus.
Rush on, my prince,
We'll start and reach the goal of fate at once!

[Runs off.

Enter on the other Side, Queen and Attendants, with
Lights.

Queen. Why am I summon'd with this call of
This is no common ruin; Artaxerxes! [death]
And Memnon's daughter!

1st At. Oh, dismal sight!

[Looking.

Queen. What is it frights thy eyes?

1st At. Old Memnon's body,

Upon the floor the batter'd carcase lies
Well'ring in gore.

Queen. Fierce despair

Has forc'd a way for the impetuous soul.

'Tis well, he is in peace—What means this tumult?

[Shout, clashing of swords.

Enter an Officer, his Sword drawn.

Off. Fly, Madam, lest your person be not safe;
The traitor Bagoas, to whose charge you trusted
The prince your son, has drawn the guards to join
And now, assisted by the furious rabble, [him,
On every side they charge those few who keep
This palace and the temple, with loud outcries,
Proclaiming that they mean to free the pris'ners.
Orbanes, ere I fled to give you notice,
Fell by the prince's hand; the raging torrent
Bore down our weak resistance, and pursuing
With furious haste, e'en trod upon my flight:
This instant brings them here.

Queen. Let them come on,
I cannot fear; this storm is rais'd too late
I stand secure of all I wish already.

[Shout, and clashing of swords again.

Enter Artaban, Cleantes, and Attendants, with
their Swords drawn.

Art. Then virtue is in vain, since base deceit
And treachery have triumph'd o'er the mighty.
Oh, nature! let me turn my eyes away,
Lest I am blasted by a mother's sight.

Queen. Ungrateful rebel! do thy impious arms
Pursue me for my too indulgent fondness
And care for thee?

Art. Well has that care been shewn;
Have you not foully stain'd my sacred fame?
Look on that scene of blood! the dire effects
Of cruel female arts. But, oh, what recompense?
What can you give me for my murder'd love?
Has not the labyrinth of your fatal counsels
Involv'd my fair, my lovely, lost Cleone?
By our bright gods I swear, I will assert
The majesty of manly government,
Nor wear again your chains.

Queen. Thou talk'st as if thy infant hand could
grasp,

Guide, and command the fortune of the world;
But thou art young in pow'r. Remember, boy,
Thy father, once the hero of his age,
Was proud to be the subject of my sway;
The warrior to the woman's wit gave way,
And found it was his interest to obey:
And dost thou hope to shake off my command?
Dost thou, the creature of my forming hand?
When I assert the pow'r thou dar'st invade,
Like Heaven I will resolve to be obey'd,
And rule or ruin that which once I made.

[Exeunt Queen and Attendants.

Art. Let a guard wait the queen: tho' nature plead
For reverence to her person, jealous power
Must watch her subtle and ambitious wit.
Hast thou secur'd the impious priest, Cleantes?

Magas, that wretch that prostitutes our gods?

Cle. Already he has met the fate he merited.
Some fury more than mortal seiz'd the crowd:
At once they rush'd, at once they cry'd, Revenge;
Then snatch'd, and tore the trembling priest to
pieces.

What was most strange, no injury was offer'd
To any of the brotherhood beside,
But all their rage was ended in his death:
Like formal justice that severely strikes,
And in an instant is serene and calm.

Art. Oh, my Cleantes! do but cast thy thoughts
Back on the recent story of this night;
And thou with me wilt wonder, and confess
The gods are great and just.

May this example guide my future sway:
Let honour, truth, and justice, crown my reign,
Ne'er let my kingly word be given in vain,
But ever sacred with my soot remain.
On these foundations shall my empire stand,
The gods shall vindicate my just command,
And guard that power they trusted to my hand.

